

# The Basics of Hunting Access in Washington



**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Wildlife Program  
Hunter Education Division**

May 2016

**(This page intentionally left blank.)**

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
Types of Lands.....	7
Public Lands .....	7
Private Lands.....	7
Tribal Lands .....	7
Access Passes .....	7
WDFW Vehicle Access Pass.....	7
Washington Discover Pass .....	8
USFS Northwest Forest Pass .....	8
USFS Interagency Pass .....	8
Finding Access .....	8
WDFW Hunting Access Page.....	9
GoHunt Interactive Mapping Tool .....	9
Navigating GoHunt.....	10
WDFW Private Lands Access Programs.....	11
Feel Free to Hunt .....	11
Register to Hunt .....	12
Hunt by Written Permission.....	12
Hunt by Reservation.....	12
Landowner Hunting Permits .....	13
Asking for Private Lands Access .....	13
Hunter Education Training.....	16
Becoming a Hunter Education Instructor .....	16
Master Hunter Permit Program .....	16
Ten Basic Safety Rules.....	17

**It is your responsibility to know where you are.  
Don't trespass.  
Be responsible.  
Know before you go.**

Refer to this helpful guide to understand the acronyms used in the booklet.

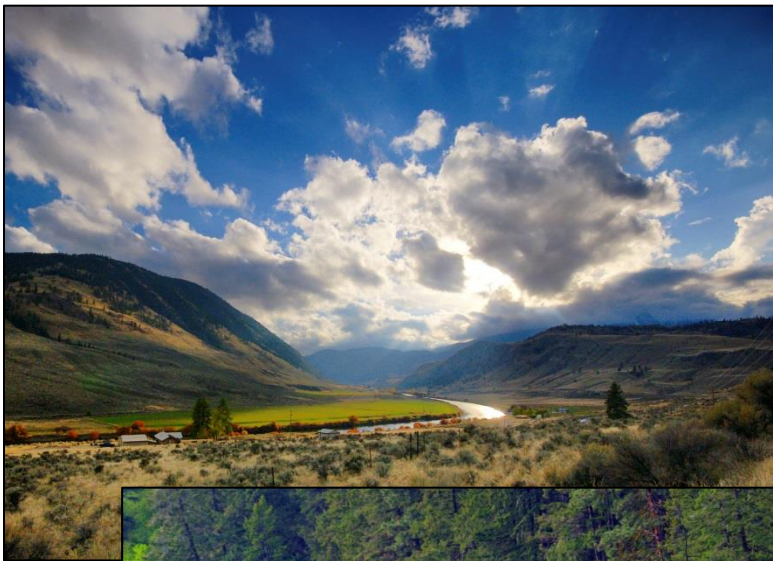
<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
WDNR	Washington Department of Natural Resources
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
NPS	National Park Service
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
RCO	Washington Recreation and Conservation Office

## **Introduction**

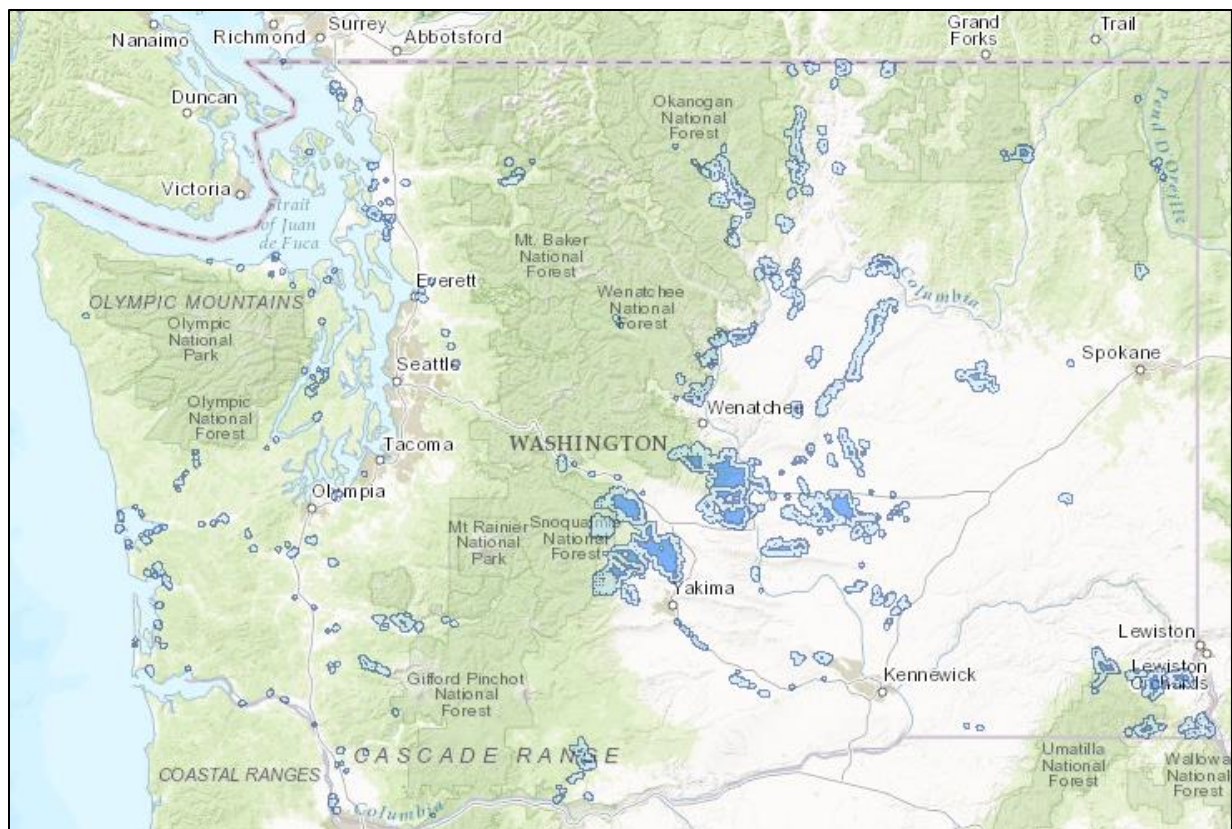
This booklet will help you find locations to hunt on public and private lands here in Washington State.

Hunting access is currently one of the biggest concerns for hunters. In Washington, about 50% of the land is publicly owned and open to hunters and recreationists. These lands are managed by state or federal entities. State owned lands are managed by WDFW and WDNR. Federally owned lands are managed by BLM, USFWS, NPS, USFS, BOR, etc. State and federal lands all have different land management mandates that affect when and where hunting is permitted. WDFW owns and manages 33 wildlife areas throughout the state, totaling approximately one million acres. WDNR manages nearly 5.6 million acres. Public lands are great places to hunt, watch birds, hike, and enjoy the outdoors.

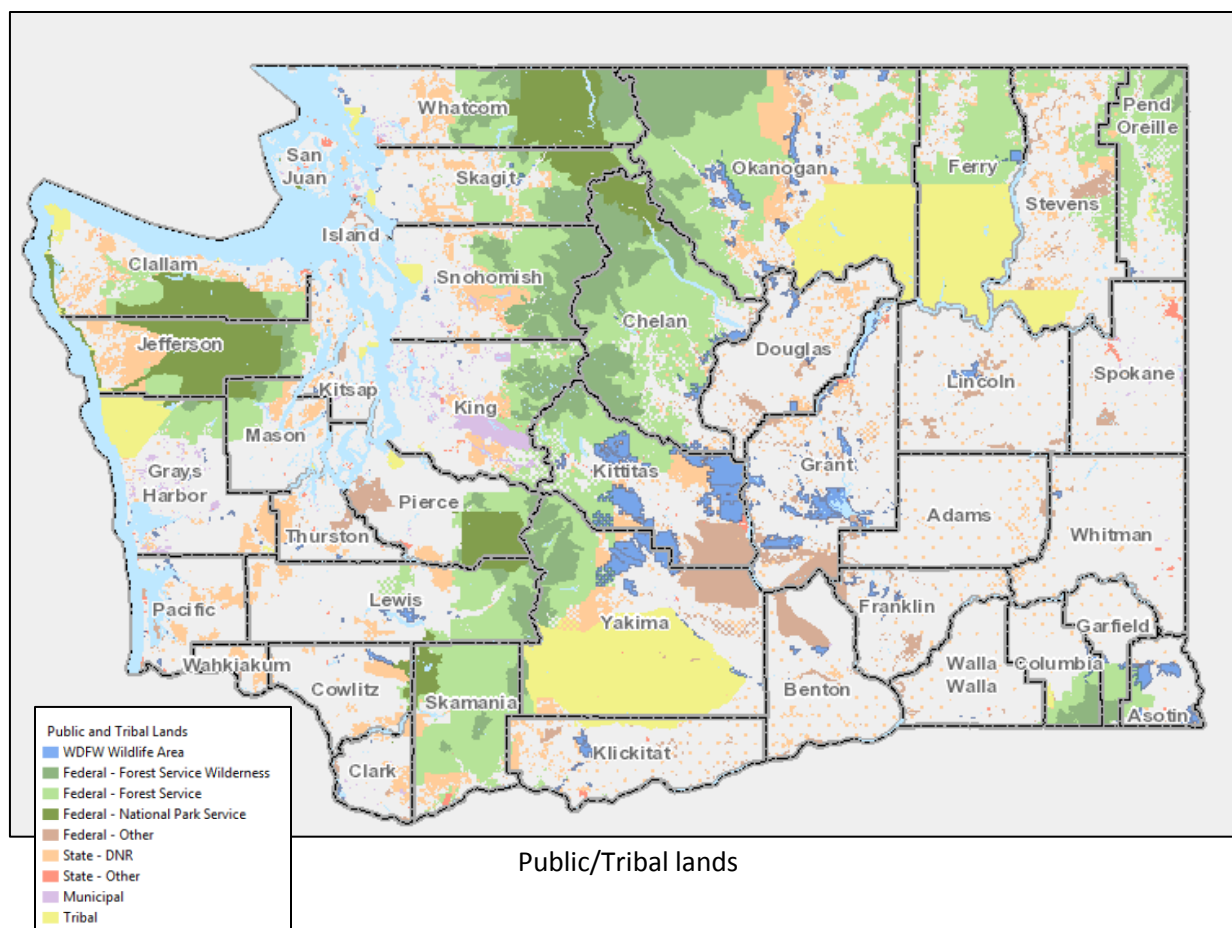
In addition to public land, there are more than 600 cooperators that allow public access on more than one million acres of privately owned property for various outdoor recreation opportunities.







WDFW Wildlife Areas



Public/Tribal lands

## **Types of Lands**

### **Public Lands**

Public lands are open to all members of the public. This is great news for outdoor enthusiasts in Washington because it guarantees that there will always be land open for outdoor recreation. These lands are typically owned by state or federal government agencies, but some are owned by cities and counties. Check the regulations for the different agencies to learn what their rules and regulations are, as some may not allow hunting or other activities based on the agencies' missions. Some agencies may also require an access or parking pass.

### **Private Lands**

Private lands are not publicly owned. These lands are generally off limits to the public, as private landowners have the right to prohibit access to their property. Hunters can contact the county assessor's office for information on landownership for each land parcel in the county. Please note that some parcels have a Limited Liability Company (LLC) or other entities listed as the owner, in which case ownership may be difficult to determine.

Current state laws under RCW 84.34 provide a lower tax rate for private forest land that is designated for timber production. However, the law does not state that public access is a requirement. The best source of information for hunters is the private forest landowner who manages the property of interest.

### **Tribal Lands**

Some tribal lands allow public hunting, and there are generally additional fees or permits required to access the property. Many of the open tribal lands are managed to provide additional hunting access for users. The best source of information for hunters is the tribal entity managing the property of interest.

## **Access Passes**

### **WDFW Vehicle Access Pass**

This pass covers most day use fees on WDFW lands **ONLY**. The pass allows the driver and any passengers in a private vehicle the use of the recreational areas. Additional fees may be charged at camp sites or other developed recreation sites. The Vehicle Access Pass is interchangeable between two vehicles. To be displayed, the pass must be visible from outside of the vehicle (placed on dash, hung from rear view mirror, etc.) so Enforcement personnel can verify that the vehicle is legally parked on lands managed by WDFW. For a list of locations requiring the Vehicle Access Pass, visit the WDFW web pages listed below:

WDFW Wildlife Areas – [www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife\\_areas/](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/)

WDFW Water Access Sites – [www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/water\\_access/](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/water_access/)

## Washington Discover Pass

This pass covers most day use fees on WDFW, WDNR, and Parks lands. The pass allows the driver and any passengers in a private vehicle the use of these recreational areas. Additional fees may be charged at camp sites or other developed recreation sites. The Discover Pass is interchangeable between two vehicles. To be displayed, the pass must be visible from outside of the vehicle (placed on dash, hung from rear view mirror, etc.) so Enforcement personnel can verify that the vehicle is legally parked on lands managed by WDFW, WDNR, and Parks.

For a list of locations requiring the Discover Pass, visit the Discover Pass website at [www.discoverpass.wa.gov](http://www.discoverpass.wa.gov).

## USFS Northwest Forest Pass

This pass covers most day use fees on National Forest lands in Washington and Oregon. The pass allows the driver and any passengers in a private vehicle the use of USFS recreational facilities. Additional fees may be charged at camp sites or other developed recreation sites. The Northwest Forest Pass is interchangeable between vehicles in the same household. To be displayed, the pass must be hung from the rear-view mirror of the vehicle. For more information on the Northwest Forest Pass, visit the USFS web page at

[www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev2\\_027010](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev2_027010).

## USFS Interagency Pass

This pass covers the purchaser nationwide at all USFS, BLM, BOR, NPS, and USFWS sites that charge entrance or standard amenity fees. The pass has a signature line for two individuals who are then considered pass holders. The pass will admit pass holders and accompanying passengers in a private non-commercial vehicle. Please check with the agencies to determine how to display the pass. For more information on the Interagency Pass, visit the USFS web page at [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev2\\_027020](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev2_027020).

## Finding Access

Access can be very confusing and difficult if you don't know where to look. Some of the largest landowners in the state are WDFW, WDNR, and USFS. USFWS also has some locations that allow public hunting throughout the state. WDNR has printed maps available for purchase, which are great resources for finding publicly owned properties throughout Washington. For more information about WDNR's maps, see the web page at <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/buy-maps-aerial-photos-or-survey-data>.

For more information on public lands access, refer to these agency websites:

- WDFW – <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>
- WDNR – <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/>
- USFS – <http://www.fs.fed.us/>
- USFWS – <http://www.fws.gov/>
- BLM – <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en.html>
- NPS – <http://www.nps.gov/index.htm>
- BOR – <http://www.usbr.gov/>
- RCO Public Lands Inventory – <http://publiclandsinventory.wa.gov/#Map>



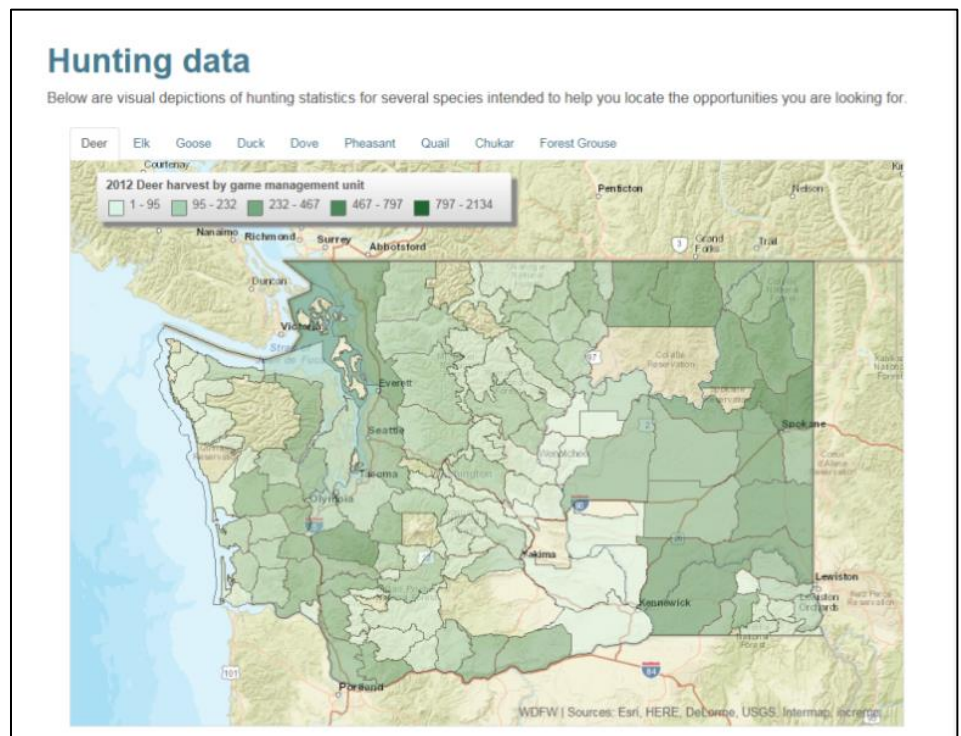
## WDFW Hunting Access Page

The WDFW hunting access web page has information about accessing and enjoying WDFW-managed lands. You can also find information about the Private Lands Access Program, properties to hunt, quality hunt opportunities, the GoHunt Interactive Mapping Tool, and several other valuable resources. Visit the hunting access page at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting\\_access/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/).

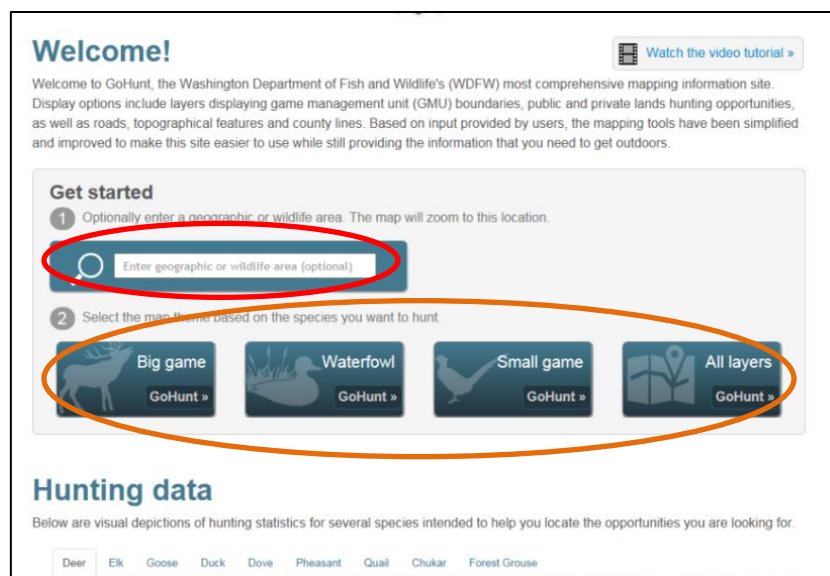
## GoHunt Interactive Mapping Tool

GoHunt is an online mapping tool developed and maintained by WDFW. This system allows hunters to print their own maps to use in the field, and distinguish the harvest by county for deer, elk, and other species. This tool can be found online at <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/>. Detailed instructions on how to use the GoHunt tool can be found at <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/help.html#i20>.

The home screen has a brief description of GoHunt and a helpful guide to getting started. At the bottom of the page, there is a map of Washington's Game Management Units (GMUs). This map is a visual representation of the deer harvest for 2012. There are areas of the Washington map that are not colored. These areas represent where hunting is not regulated by WDFW or permitted, such as tribal reservations and national parks. WDFW is currently working on updating the data more frequently.



Harvest statistics for different species are available if you select one of the other tabs just above the map. The waterfowl and small game map only show as counties because the harvest data for these species is not linked to GMUs.



## Navigating GoHunt

If you know which GMU or location you are looking for, enter it into the **search** box that says “Enter geographic or wildlife area (optional)” This is an optional feature that will help narrow the map results automatically. The next step is to select the map **theme**.

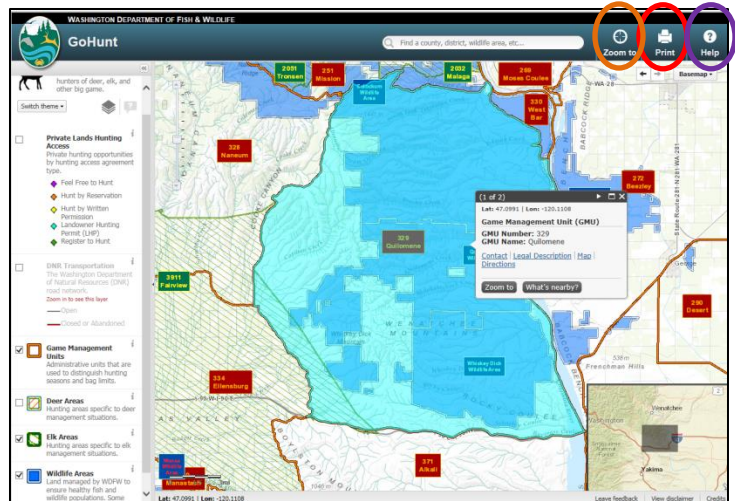
The themes will show the available information detailed in the table below:

Big Game Theme	Waterfowl Theme	Upland Bird Theme	All Layers
Private lands hunting access	Water access sites	Private lands hunting access	Water access sites
Game management units	Private lands hunting access	Pheasant release sites	Private lands hunting access
Deer areas	WDFW Regions	Game management units	Pheasant release sites
Elk areas	Wildlife areas	WDFW Regions	Game management units
Wildlife areas		Wildlife areas	Deer areas
			Elk areas
			WDFW Regions
			Wildlife areas

Once you select a theme, if you did not enter information in the blue box, the map will appear with the information populated across the entire state. Read the disclaimer that will pop up and select “OK”. If you would like to get information about a specific area, enter it in the search bar at the top of the map.

To zoom in, either double click on the area you wish to zoom, or select the up arrow in the upper left hand corner of the map. To zoom out, select the down arrow in the upper left hand of the map or select the back arrow located under the print icon. You can also change the base map to aerial, hybrid, public/tribal lands, topography, and street. If you select more info in the base map selection area, it will inform you about the different base maps.

You can uncheck any of the informational layers on the left hand side and the information will disappear from the map. It may take a few seconds for the map to update. Once you have the map configured, you can select **Print** in the upper right hand corner to print the map page you have generated. The **Zoom** function is nice if you know the latitude and longitude of the area you prefer. GoHunt's **Help** section is also a great resource to get helpful information on the tool at <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/help.html>.



If you want more information about a specific GMU, you can click on it to generate additional links. The links provide more in-depth information for that GMU, including the identity of the contact, legal description, general map, and directions to the GMU. There is also a “What’s nearby?” button that will list other features on the left hand side of the map, such as water access sites, pheasant release sites, other GMUs, the relevant region, and nearby wildlife areas. It defaults to within 10 miles, but can be adjusted to include up to a 50 mile radius. The tool uses the location on the map you clicked as the center of the radius.

## **WDFW Private Lands Access Programs**

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through negotiated agreements. To mitigate some of the impacts of more limited and restricted access throughout the state, WDFW has been working to increase recreational opportunities on private lands by securing grant funds, increasing private lands staff, and increasing public outreach. Through these efforts, WDFW has enrolled roughly one million acres of privately owned property for public access. WDFW currently has five types of private lands access programs, described below.

### **Feel Free to Hunt**

Private lands in this program are open to hunting. Hunters are not required to gain additional permission for hunting lands that have a Feel Free to Hunt sign posted.

To find properties that are part of the Feel Free to Hunt program, visit the WDFW website at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting\\_access/private\\_land/type/22/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_land/type/22/).

## **Register to Hunt**

Access to private lands in this program are regulated by registration. Hunters are required to sign in and sign out to hunt on properties that have a Register to Hunt sign posted. These properties may also have some other restrictions, which are detailed online.

To find properties that are part of the Register to Hunt program, visit the WDFW website at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting\\_access/private\\_lands/type/25/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_lands/type/25/).

## **Hunt by Written Permission**

These properties are private lands where hunters must contact the landowner to obtain “written permission” before hunting. WDFW provides signs and permission slips to landowners who make their lands available through this program. A landowner name and contact telephone number are placed on the Hunt by Written Permission signs so hunters can contact the appropriate landowner for permission. Hunters are required to obtain landowner contact information by visiting the property and acquiring the information directly from the sign. WDFW does **NOT** provide the contact information directly to hunters.

When talking to the landowners, be sure to be courteous and respectful. The landowners are not required to give permission to all those seeking it because they control the hunting pressure on their property. To increase the chances of gaining access, seek permission well before the season starts. For fall hunts, July or August are good times to contact landowners. Even if they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Be sure to respect the landowner’s wishes and their property restrictions.

To find properties that are part of the Hunt by Written Permission program, visit the WDFW website at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting\\_access/private\\_lands/type/24/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_lands/type/24/).

## **Hunt by Reservation**

These private lands require hunters to have a reservation permit issued by WDFW prior to hunting. In some cases, landowner contact may also be required. All rules of the WDFW Hunt by Reservation program must be followed, in addition to any special rules set by the individual property, including those posted at the site.

The Hunt by Reservation system requires hunters to sign up for an account using their WILD ID and password. You will use your WILD ID as the sign in name. Your WILD ID is a unique identification number for the Washington Interactive Licensing Database (WILD) and can be found near the top of your hunting/fishing license, just above the barcode. The sign-up page can be found on the WDFW website at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting\\_access/private\\_lands/myreservations.php](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_lands/myreservations.php).

Once logged into the system, select the “Find Hunts to Reserve” button. This will open a page listing properties by County, Hunt Type, and GMU. This is a great feature because if you know you want to hunt Adams County, it makes those easier to find. If you want to hunt GMU 101



because of season and legal animal restrictions, it will distinguish hunts by GMU as well. To distinguish “Hunt by Reservation” properties only, select the “Hunt Type” tab and go to the “Hunt by Reservation” section.

Once you have found a property, select the name from the list and read the information about the property’s restrictions. If you agree to the restrictions, you can select the general hunt time frame that is open and select the “Hunt Details” button. Note that there is a bit of text below the button that will give you the status of the property: if the property is full, reservations have not yet started, or reservations are being accepted for that property. When you’re in the hunt details, you will want to select the available “Hunt Dates” drop down menu and select the dates you wish to hunt. After selecting those dates, read the terms and conditions, check the box agreeing to those terms and conditions, and then select “Reserve Hunt Date.”

Once a reservation is made, it will be listed in your “Active Reservations” list in the Private Lands Reservation System. You can view/edit the reservation, print the permit, and/or cancel your reservation from this page. Permits are required to be printed and clearly displayed on the dashboard of your vehicle in order to access the property.

For more information or for questions on the Hunt by Reservation tool, please see the online help section at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/help/categories/Hunting/Hunt+by+Reservation+System/>.

### **Landowner Hunting Permits**

In order to hunt on a property enrolled in the WDFW Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP) program, hunters must either be selected in a special permit drawing held by WDFW or the Landowner or contact the Landowner directly. Landowner name is included on signs posted on property boundaries. In addition to a hunting permit from WDFW, hunters must contact the landowner prior to hunting and obtain a written permission slip that must remain with them while hunting on the property. LHP properties may be listed under the Hunt by Reservation program.

### **Asking for Private Lands Access**

Another option to get onto private lands for hunting is by contacting landowners to ask permission. If hunters want to gain access to private property, they should do preseason scouting of their desired area and locate the lands they might want to hunt. Once a hunter has located properties to hunt, landowner contact information can be obtained from the county tax assessor’s office. Look on the county assessor’s web page. The local phone book, the white pages, and 411 can assist in locating landowner information as well. Private companies hunting applications can assist with some information and are great to have on your smartphone. Asking for landowner permission should be done several weeks prior to hunting season if possible.

Landowners may refuse to grant permission. If they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Hunters who are persistent in their search will most likely gain access to some

lightly hunted areas and make new friends along the way. Other options include hunt clubs and hiring a guide who has access to private farms and ranches.

In all instances, respect the landowner's wishes and their property restrictions. By being respectful, you are doing your part to help ensure future access to their lands. It only takes one bad experience to taint a landowner's view of the hunting public.

Keep these following guidelines in mind:

- Leave gates the way you find them.
- Do not litter, and if you find litter, pick it up and carry it out.
- Ask if there is anything you can do to help with the operation (e.g. repair fences, plant trees, remove old fences, paint buildings, etc.)
- Be respectful and polite when seeking permission.
- Be conscious of time when calling and do not become a nuisance (4am calls are not viewed favorably).
- Seek permission early and do not wait until opening day.
- Wear street clothes when approaching landowners. Do not show up wearing hunting clothes and carrying a hunting implement.

The next page features a landowner contact form that WDFW has come to adopt. This form can be used by hunters for contact information on the landowner and to show proof of permission to be on the property. Hunters can remove the portion above the dotted line to give to the landowner for their records.

# Landowner Communication Form

## Hunter Contact Information

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone #(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Vehicle Description & Plate #: \_\_\_\_\_
- Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

---

## Landowner Information

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Address: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone #(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Preferred Contact Method: \_\_\_\_\_

## Sample Questions to ask the Landowner

### Permission

- Am I allowed to camp on your land? If so, are campfires allowed?
- Do you anticipate that anyone would be upset if I park my RV or camp near the area?

### Safety

- Is there anything on your property or near your home I should know about?
  - soft ground
  - animals (dogs, livestock, etc.)
  - drainage/erosion issues
  - vehicles/structures out of site
  - neighbors that may not approve of hunting
  - special or sensitive vegetation
  - Other?

### Is there anything I can do to help out?

- Buck hay, clean windows, mend fence, repair equipment, other?
- Would you like any part of the animal(s) I harvest?
- Hunters could make an effort to pick up trash on or around the property. This effort is always appreciated and helps out even if the landowner doesn't ask for any help.

### Courtesy

- What are your family's/neighbor's normal quiet hours? I do not wish to disturb you.
- Is there anything you would like me to report to you if I see it?
- Am I allowed to hunt your entire property?

### Navigation

- Where do you wish me to park my vehicle(s)?
- Which gates should remain open/closed? *In general leave gate(s) the way you found them.*

### Hunting

- Are there any game species you wish me to or to NOT harvest on your property?
- Is it ok to field dress game on the property?

## **Hunter Education Training**

When purchasing a hunting license, all individuals born after January 1, 1972 must show proof that they have completed a Hunter Education course. Students have the choice of taking a traditional class, usually held over several evenings, or completing an online course and field skills evaluation. The traditional course has in-person teaching from a group of Hunter Education Instructors. The online course allows the students to complete the class on their own time. Once the student has passed the online test, they have to demonstrate safe firearms handling in various hunting situations. Students can enroll in a Washington Hunter Education course by visiting the website at <https://www.register-ed.com/programs/washington/agency:6?>

## **Becoming a Hunter Education Instructor**

Hunter Education instructors are volunteers who devote personal time and effort to ensuring our hunting heritage is passed on to the next generation of safe, ethical hunters. Certified by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Hunter Education instructors are authorized to teach public classes consistent with curriculum and policies established by WDFW. Instructors must be at least 21 years of age, keenly interested in promoting safety, wildlife conservation, and responsible outdoor behavior, and be willing to teach or assist in at least one class per year. If you are interested in becoming an instructor, please see the Hunter Education web page at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/become\\_instructor.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/become_instructor.html).

## **Master Hunter Permit Program**

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting in Washington State and should conduct themselves as role models for the rest of the hunting community. These members give back to the resource through their volunteer work and help promote safe and ethical hunting. They also assist the department in resolving certain human/wildlife conflict situations. The Master Hunter Permit Program is always looking for good applicants who are willing to help create goodwill between the department and landowners by volunteering to help mend fences, clear brush, and haze wildlife from agricultural fields. If you are interested in becoming a Master Hunter, please see the Master Hunter web page at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/index.html>.



## **Ten Basic Safety Rules**

1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and under control.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. Use your safety, but remember that safeties sometimes fail.
4. Be sure of your target and what lies beyond before firing.
5. Never place or carry a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle.
6. Never use a firearm unless you are familiar with how it works. If you need an owner's manual, write to the manufacturer.
7. Never cross a fence, climb a tree, cross a stream or jump a ditch with a loaded firearm.
8. Never point at anything you do not want to shoot.
9. Unload firearms when not in use. Store firearms and ammunition separately.
10. Never use alcohol (or drugs) before or during shooting.

## **Learn More about WDFW's Hunter Education Program**

### **Website**

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/>

### **Email**

[huntered@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:huntered@dfw.wa.gov)

### **Regional Offices**

Region 1 Spokane Office: (509) 892-1001  
Region 2 Ephrata Office: (509) 754-4624  
Region 3 Yakima Office: (509) 575-2740  
Region 4 Mill Creek Office: (425) 775-1311  
Region 5 Vancouver Office: (360) 696-6211  
Region 6 Montesano Office: (360) 239-4628  
Headquarters Olympia Office: (360) 902-8111

### **More Information**

For more information about the Hunter Education Program, contact our staff in Olympia at (360) 902-8111.

### **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Headquarters  
1111 Washington St SE  
Olympia WA 98501  
[wdfw.wa.gov](http://wdfw.wa.gov)

*The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) receives federal assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and provides equal access to its programs, services, activities, and facilities under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.*

*The U.S. Department of the Interior and WDFW prohibit discrimination on the bases of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, mental or physical disability, reprisal, sexual orientation, status as a parent, and genetic information. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please contact the WDFW ADA Program Manager, PO Box 43139, Olympia, WA 98504 within 45 calendar days of the alleged incident before filing a formal complaint, or write to: Chief, Public Civil Rights Division, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington DC 20240.*

*If you need further assistance or information, please contact the Olympia office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: (360) 902-2349, or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), (360) 902-2207.*